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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 281746Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY BELMOPAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0657
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0003
RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA 0056
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0002

C O N F I D E N T I A L BELMOPAN 000435

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DEPT FOR DS/CR, DS/CR/CIL, DS/IP/WHA, WHA/CEN, CA/VO,
DS/FLD/MFO, GUATEMALA FOR DHS/ICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/22/2017

TAGS: ASEC CVIS BH

SUBJECT: BELMOPAN: DIRECTOR, BELIZE IMMIGRATION MEETS WITH
RSO RE IMMIGRATION CORRUPTION PROBLEMS

Classified By: RSO Patrick J. Harms for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 21, 2007, Gareth Murillo, Director of Immigration, met with RSO Belmopan to share information re a suspected corrupt Immigration Officer assisting a Cuban with a counterfeit Guatemalan passport and U.S. visa, and the political pressure to issue visas to Chinese (and the flow of Chinese through Cuba). END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Director of Immigration Gareth Murillo requested a meeting with RSO Belmopan the afternoon of June 21, 2007. In the meeting, he presented photocopies of a Guatemalan passport and a U.S. visa for Juan Emilio PINEDA GUZMAN (SUBJECT). Murillo stated SUBJECT was Cuban, and had been detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Miami on June 16 because both the passport and visa were counterfeit. SUBJECT had departed Belize that day via American Airlines to Miami.

¶3. (SBU) Murillo stated American Airlines had been approached by U.S. ICE with the potential of being fined for allowing a blatant counterfeit document through. The American agent at the airport in Belize City reported that he remembered SUBJECT going through the checkpoint, but that he was escorted by a Belize Immigration Officer, Nikolai ZELAYA. Murillo said ZELAYA had long been suspected of corruption, and asked if ICE could obtain a statement from SUBJECT that could be used to fire ZELAYA. RSO told Murillo such an attempt would be made, and asked if charges would be brought; Murillo stated if a sworn statement had enough evidence, he would attempt to charge ZELAYA.

¶4. (C) Murillo also spoke of the political pressure to grant visas to Chinese and Cubans. Many, he said, come through Cuba. He stated he would ask "those in position" to stop putting such pressure to grant so many visas to Chinese, due to the overwhelming workload and inability to screen the applicants. (Belize is a human smuggling transit point, and it is widely believed that large numbers of Chinese are moving through Belize with the sanction of politicians.) RSO asked Murillo how many came through Cuba, and he said he was unsure. RSO asked if he would provide that information, and he replied that he would. It has now been one week, and in each contact since Murillo has not had that information.

¶5. (SBU) Following the meeting with Murillo, RSO contacted Miami Field Office (DS/FLD/MFO) re obtaining a statement from SUBJECT. Special Agent Fernando Cepeda contacted Immigration officers at Miami Airport, and confirmed SUBJECT's arrival, detention, and release. An address for SUBJECT has been obtained, and SA Cepeda is attempting to contact SUBJECT to obtain a statement re Zelaya.

¶6. (C) RSO believes Murillo's assistance and commitment is limited, and does not expect accurate numbers of visas issued from the Belizean Embassy in Cuba.

¶7. (U) Point of Contact for this cable is Patrick Harms, RSO, Belmopan, 501-822-4011, ext 4007.

DIETER